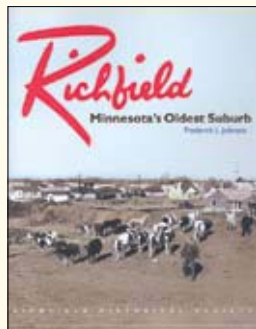


## Richfield: Minnesota's Oldest Suburb

Frederick L. Johnson

*(Richfield, MN: Richfield Historical Society, 2008. 161 p. Cloth, \$29.95.)*



The current oil-price increases have focused both state and national attention once again on transportation and daily home-to-work commuting distances. In such an environment, the suburbs are the focus of renewed scrutiny, with especially unfavorable attention reserved for communities now known as “outer ring suburbs”—those developed in recent decades far beyond a city’s original boundaries.

But this attention can redound to the benefit of the older, inner-ring suburbs that mushroomed immediately after World War II. Of these communities, one stands out as the poster child of postwar suburban development—and it may surprise some readers to discover that it is Richfield. While the city of Richfield is certainly well known within the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area, the fact that it is now virtually ringed by freeways means that most Twin Citians whiz past it at high speed without ever venturing in. To many, it remains just a name on a highway exit sign.

Many suburbs share a reputation as relatively faceless places—bedroom communities for people who work and, often, shop and play elsewhere. Only a few have managed to establish a larger identity, often linked to some natural advantage like water recreation (Wayzata and White Bear Lake, for example) or to a regional attraction like the Mall of America in Bloomington. Other suburbs sometimes have difficulty establishing rapport even with their residents.

Suburban development has begun to be studied in depth, and in Minnesota the celebration of Richfield’s sesquicentennial has brought a new resource of definite value. Richfield is fortunate to have a cadre of citizens with genuine civic pride, and the organization they founded more than 40 years ago—the Richfield Historical Society—has published an excellent hometown history.

Author Frederick Johnson has done a fine job in articulating this story, especially in placing Richfield within the context of state and metropolitan history that inevitably influenced the city’s development. Beginning as a settlement outside Fort Snelling, Richfield once encompassed all of south Minneapolis, much of Edina, and all the land now occupied by the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. The reduction in Richfield’s original size began as early as 1886 and continued intermittently for years, with communities including St. Louis Park and Edina created as Richfield shrank.

Johnson does a detailed job of tracing Richfield’s agricultural past, noting that its flat land was especially conducive to farming. The book’s cover photograph, showing a farm worker herding cows through a field bordering a housing development, graphically points out that this land also proved attractive to postwar housing development.

If Richfield’s status as a farming community was dictated by the lay of its land base, so too was its transformation after World War II. Returning veterans, armed with G. I. Bill benefits, spurred a housing boom that rapidly changed Richfield from a rural community to a bedroom community. Sporadic attempts to develop retail and commercial areas in the city were attended by spirited debates over Richfield’s identity as a residential community, debates that eventually led to far more commercial development in surrounding cities like Edina and Bloomington.

The impact of state and interstate highway systems is well chronicled also, as the construction of I-494 and I-35W, together with state highways 62 (the Crosstown) and 77 (a much enlarged Cedar Avenue), encased Richfield within rigid boundaries of concrete and asphalt. Another development that helped define its boundaries was the dramatic growth of the airport, which gradually took all of the land in the city’s far eastern portion, including the entire community of New Ford Town, built to house workers at the nearby Ford Motor Company plant in St. Paul.

While the most recent history of Richfield receives less coverage than its historic past, Johnson does review the city’s continuing efforts to maintain its housing stock, construct new retail outlets, and develop additional residential options. Indeed, this aspect of Richfield’s recent history deserves attention as the city—once again a poster child for suburban development—places itself in the forefront of older, inner-ring suburbs engaged in reinventing themselves to fit current community needs. Bringing the world headquarters of discount giant Best Buy to Richfield was a coup, as is the successful replacement of outdated retail space with high-rise condominiums and new retail that meets current consumer preferences.

While there are other suburban stories to be told in Minnesota, Richfield’s can easily stand as quintessential. Johnson has produced an excellent review of this very American story, and the Richfield Historical Society deserves considerable credit for ensuring that the city’s history is well told and well documented. The book stands as an example for other cities to emulate as they approach similar milestones.

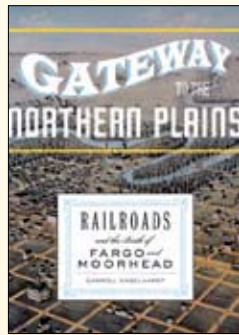
*Reviewed by James E. Fogerty, head of documentary programs at the Minnesota Historical Society and director of a recent oral history project on Richfield’s postwar development.*

**Gateway to the Northern Plains: Railroads and the Birth of Fargo and Moorhead**

**Carroll Engelhardt**

*(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 366 p. Cloth, \$29.95.)*

Carroll Engelhardt has written a brilliant study of Fargo and Moorhead from 1871 to 1900, and it is certain to be held up as a model for how local and regional history should be written. What makes this book outstanding is that it functions easily and expertly on at least four levels. First and foremost, this is local history at a very sophisticated level. Engelhardt has mined the local newspapers and earlier memoirs and accounts of the settlement and growth of the two communities.



In addition, he has found valuable papers of leading local families in eastern libraries, and these have provided a more penetrating insight into the successes and failures of several of the figures that shaped the two communities. He has also unraveled something of the complicated economic history of the two towns by examining the records of the Northern Pacific Railway, the Great Northern Railway, the McCormick Harvester Machine Company, and the R. G. Dun Company (the financial ratings firm), to show how Fargo and Moorhead fitted into the economic development of the Midwest in the decades after the Civil War. This is crucial in view of the crippling financial crises that gripped the United States in 1873 and 1893 and the effects these panics had on the railroads servicing Fargo and Moorhead and the process of westward expansion.

Comparative history is much more talked about than practiced, so on another level this study of two settlements in the same volume is a distinctive example of historical writing. There must have been few Midwest communities built along any railroad in this era that did not imagine themselves becoming the “new Chicago.” Omaha and Kansas City perhaps came closest, but why not Moorhead or Fargo? In a memorable phrase, Engelhardt observes, “Federal land grants transformed transcontinental railroads into private colonizers,” but he also concludes that the railroads actually “incorporated western lands, cities, and resources into the eastern industrial system.” Despite their aspirations, neither of the two communities became the “new Chicago,” nor did they become self-sufficient industrial cities. However, Fargo soon became the distribution center that Moorhead had expected to be. Indeed, Fargo, benefiting from the western

access of the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern, developed the hinterland of North Dakota and Montana, preempting Moorhead in the process.

On a third level, Engelhardt writes a very interesting social history. As might be expected, he outlines the process of settlement and early community building, the influence of immigrants and cultural diversity, and the establishment of churches and what he calls the “moral order.” What is particularly valuable, however, is his discussion of the tensions between the middle-class “establishment” with its quest for order, security, respectability, and refinement, and, on the other hand, the large numbers of unattached men working on the railroads or as farm hands and seasonal harvesters, who created a market for saloons, gambling dens, and brothels. Both the social reality and sheer economics made it very difficult to suppress vice, but the issue remained a constant irritant for many in the community. Engelhardt also explores the complexities of city government and boosterism. How can a frontier community promote itself and encourage prosperity without selling itself completely to commercialism? Both cities struggled with these issues without ever resolving the question.

Finally, Engelhardt very skilfully puts all of this in historiographical context, and he does so in the text rather than the endnotes. Chapter by chapter, he keeps the reader informed of the writings and interpretations by other historians on issues similar to those under discussion. Thus, the book provides both an interesting view of Fargo and Moorhead and also a commentary on how these cities fit into contemporary historical literature about communities, economies, and social situations in post-Civil War America. While this is not a guidebook to writing local and regional history, it points the way toward many of the most influential, relevant historical studies. The extensive endnotes are sources of valuable information for further research and writing. The only quarrel to be had with the book is that it does not have a systematic bibliography in which all of the vast manuscript sources, published documents, and secondary works are conveniently listed. In all other respects, this is a treasure of information about Moorhead and Fargo and a model of local and regional history writing.

*Reviewed by Francis M. Carroll, professor emeritus of history at St. John’s College, University of Manitoba, who has published ten books, including Carlton Chronicles, a history of Carlton, Minnesota, written with Marlene Wisuri (2006).*

## OUR READERS WRITE:

*Dan Lapham of Hopkins remembered the Lookout Park Wayside profiled in the last issue's "LandMarks" feature. In fact, the essay prompted him to wonder if there would be some way to save the deteriorating site.*

"I enjoyed reading the article by Jane King Hession about the Hwy 212 Minnesota River Valley overlook in Eden Prairie. My dad recalled a more basic overlook at least 10 years before the 1938 improvements—probably built as the highway was constructed. In the 1960s it was still usable, but as the article said, years of neglect have left it in a sorry state today. This is a quieter road again, with the opening of the new Hwy 312 bypass, and I think restoration of this site to its Depression era origins would be very appropriate."

■ Dr. Clarence Walton Lillehei's groundbreaking surgical work extended to the use of pacemakers and prosthetic heart valves at the University Hospital of Minnesota. *The Genius of C. Walton Lillehei and the True History of Open Heart Surgery* by Daniel A. Goor, who studied under Lillehei, explores the doctor's triumphs and tribulations (New York: Vantage Press, 2007, 430 p., \$26.95). In telling Lillehei's story, Goor places his work in the context of innovative heart procedures from the first cardiac surgery to today's bypass techniques. The result brings to light the achievements of a forgotten medical pioneer.

■ After the Dakota War of 1862, remnants of the Dakota people joined others at Spirit Lake, North Dakota, and in 1867 the U.S. government signed a treaty establishing a reservation there. *Mni Wakan Oyate (Spirit Lake Nation): A History of the Sisuwan, Wahpeton, Pabaksa, and Other Dakota that Settled at Spirit Lake, North Dakota* by Mark Diedrich (Fort Totten, ND: Cankdeska Cikana Community College Publishing, 2007, 433 p., \$29.95) traces their lives through struggles to feed themselves, the tragedy of allotment, and poverty and unemployment following World War II. The closing chapters explore better times on the modern reservation as residents benefit from manufacturing jobs and casino revenue.

■ *The Sioux in South Dakota History: A Twentieth-Century Reader*, edited by

Richmond L. Clow (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2007, 320 p., \$18.95), offers perspective on modern American Indian political and cultural life, exploring such topics as the struggle for land, health issues on reservations, the growth of rodeos, changing government policy, and the 1973 confrontation at Wounded Knee. Collected from the pages of *South Dakota History*, the quarterly journal of the state's historical society, these essays examine the tremendous changes the Sioux experienced during the last century.

■ Paul Bunyan, Mary Tyler Moore, and a community May Day parade join the likes of Little Crow, the doctors Mayo, and Henry Sibley in Karal Ann Marling's sesquicentennial history, *Minnesota Hail to Thee!* (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 2008, 163 p., cloth, \$28.00). This brief, breezy history, heavily illustrated, designed like a textbook, and complete with classroom activities, ends with a thought-provoking chapter, "What's Next for Minnesota?" that considers urban flight, income inequities, the energy crisis, globalization, and more.

■ *One Step Forward: The Life of Ken Dahlberg* (Minneapolis: I Was There Press, 2008, cloth, 160 p., \$32.95) relates the story of a member of Minnesota's greatest generation. Authors Al Zdon and Warren Mack chronicle Dahlberg's life from his humble beginnings on a Wisconsin farm through his entrepre-

neurial success as the founder of Miracle Ear hearing aids, involvement in the Watergate scandal, and venture capitalism. Most of the book concentrates on his World War II years, from flight training through his distinguished service. An ace pilot, he was shot down three times, captured once, and spent the last months of the war as a German prisoner.

■ The title says it all: In *Jews in Minnesota Politics: The Inside Stories* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2007, 386 p. cloth, \$29.95) author Robert (Bob) Latz draws on his own long experience as a community activist, elected official, University of Minnesota regent, and lobbyist to tell of the "people and events that have helped shape the course of Minnesota history." Beginning with the state's infamous anti-Semitism in the 1930s and 1940s and concluding in the present day, the book goes beyond profiles of candidates and leaders (though these, too, appear) to examine involvement in civic life and government in its broadest sense. Though annotated, the book bears the unmistakable stamp of its author's voice.

■ In *Facing North: Portraits of Ely, Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 192 p., hardcover, \$34.95), Ann and Andrew Goldman offer a revealing portrait of the unique people who call this northern town home. Featuring more than 100 portraits made by Andrew as well as vivid essays penned by Ann, *Facing North* tells the story of life in this north woods community: its breathtaking beauty, surprisingly diverse character, and complex history. From resort owners and fishermen to canoe makers and artists, the book is an evocative tribute to the enduring nature of Ely and its people.

■ "The history of the American brewing industry is a history of a battle between control and individual freedom," writes Amy Mittelman in the introduction to her far-reaching study, *Brewing Battles: A History of American Beer* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2008, 229 p., paper, \$22.95). Her carefully researched book



details many battles under this rubric, from colonial times to the present: federal taxation and regulation as opposed to individual (and then united) brewers' desires to control their own destiny; moral regulation in the form of Prohibition versus individuals' wishes to control their own behavior; and corporate conglomeration challenged by craft brewers and niche marketers. Mittelman does not neglect ethnicity in this story, telling how immigrant German and Czech brewers made lager king of American beers.

■ All aboard! Interest in the state's railroads remains at full steam. First, a regional perspective: two books explore the history of the longest-running railroad in American history. With 100 dazzling color photographs, Tom Murray's *Chicago and North Western Railway* (Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2008, 160 p., hardcover, \$36.95) traces the road's role as a freight and passenger carrier, serving as a link between east and west. This volume also shows how the railroad met challenges from its regional rivals through its "400" series of passenger trains, a subject further explored by Jim Scribbins in *The 400 Story: Chicago and North Western's Premier Passenger Trains* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 232 p., paper, \$29.95), now back in print. Named after their ambitious schedule, "400 miles in 400 minutes," these modern, sleek, and fast rail lines were a household name at midcentury in the Upper Midwest. Relive the excitement of the era with these nicely illustrated, copiously detailed volumes.

Now back in print, Richard S. Prosser's *Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 304 p., paper, \$29.95) captures all facets of the state's railroad development, from the first land grants in 1857, to the height of street railways in the 1920s, to company consolidation in the 1960s. A foreword by eminent railroad historian Don L. Hofsommer expounds on the significance of Prosser's work, first published in 1966.

And finally, exploring the ultimate

Minnesota railroad, *James J. Hill's Legacy to Railway Operations* (Warba, MN: Earl J. Currie, 2007, 501 p., hardcover, \$65, paper, \$45) by Earl J. Currie chronicles Hill's achievement of near perfection in railroad construction, operations, economics, and management. Today's railroad managers can learn plenty from Hill's example as they seek to run an efficient, well-disciplined line. With 96 figures, maps, and drawings and 61 photographs, this volume conveys a wealth of information on the secret to Hill's success.

■ The "Little House" books have delighted youngsters for decades, but their influence supersedes simple entertain-

ment. So argues Anita Clair Fellman in *Little House, Long Shadow: Laura Ingalls Wilder's Impact on American Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008, 360 p., hardcover, \$34.95), which offers a fresh interpretation of the series, showing how the stories of the struggles and triumphs shared by the Ingalls family contributed to Americans' renewed appreciation of individualist ideals in the Reagan years and beyond. Looking to modern cultural institutions ranging from classrooms to tourism, newspaper editorials to Internet message boards, Fellman explores the continuing presence of these classics of children's literature.

## MINNESOTA HISTORY

Editor, *Anne R. Kaplan*  
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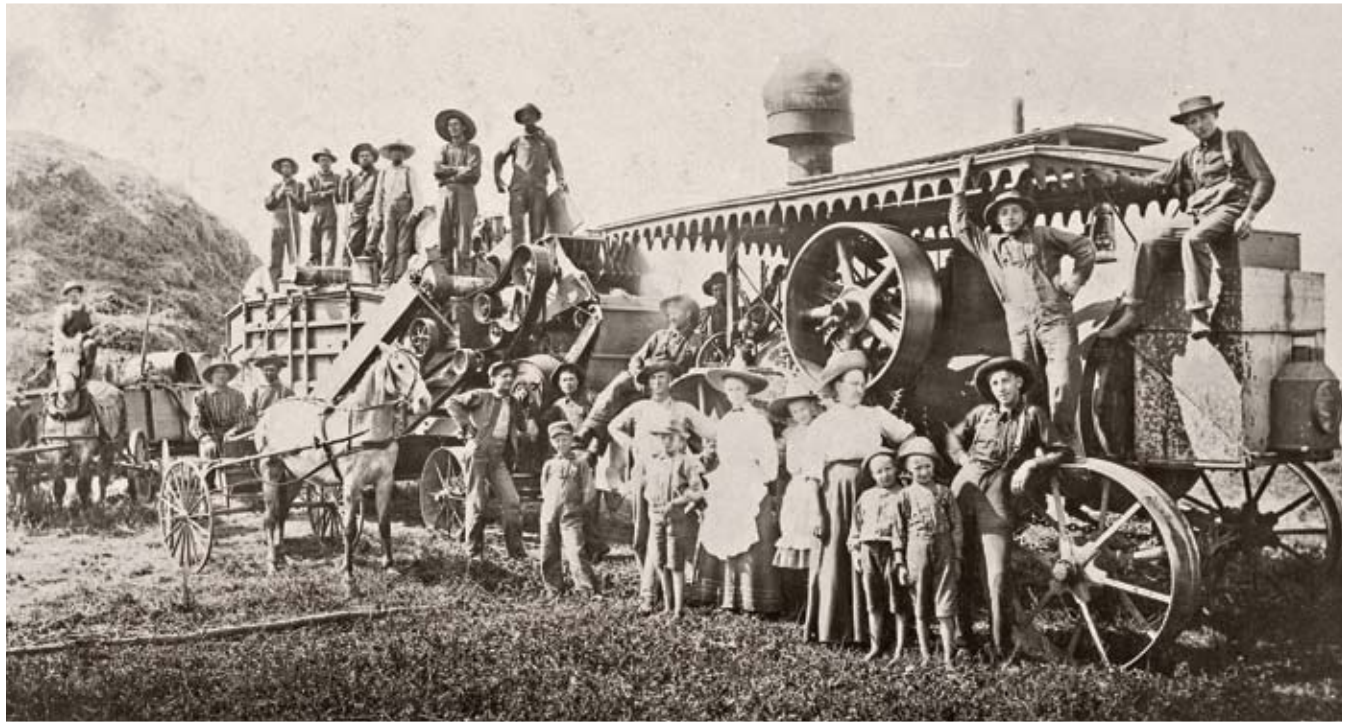


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MHS COLLECTIONS

*Threshing crew, about 1905, at Charles Johnson's farm near Center City, photographed by Seth Cedarholm (1860–1936)*

## Threshing Crew



A PHOTOGRAPH such as this brings us face to face with history: as icons of the rural past, old-fashioned steam engines and threshers are hard to beat. The Western Minnesota Steam Threshers Association holds an annual reunion in Rollag, “the place to be if you dream of steam . . . where your past is our present.” There, devotees can be in their element, like Civil War reenactors replaying a battle on the actual hallowed ground. If Rollag is not on your itinerary, it is also possible to see the antique behemoths in action in Terrence Malick’s 1978 movie *Days of Heaven*, with its magnificent grain-harvesting sequence.

This photograph shows no acting, or reenacting, beyond posing for the camera. It reminds us of the period when the machine had entered the garden but horses were still part of the scene and agriculture was not yet predominantly “agri-business.” Whether it depicts neighbors joining together in mutual support or a crew working for hire, the photograph conveys a sense of community, with men, women, and children all gathered together.

Picture-taking was a standard part of the final act of the farming season. As at weddings or graduations, the photograph records a grand event and provides a memento. There are

studio portraits of thresher gangs, but there is something especially winning about a photograph made out in the fields, with the equipment and gigantic mounds of chaff as key elements in a carefully arranged tableau. Over the image hangs the sense of the moment as a brief pause in the long day’s toil; the machines are temporarily still, and the people, too. But soon enough it would be back to work. Only the image remained frozen in time.

—ROBERT SILBERMAN

*Robert Silberman is an associate professor of art history at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.*



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